

What is Critical Realism?

It's an epistemology, a theory of knowledge that puts other epistemologies such as naive realism, empiricism, and conceptualization within a higher perspective.

What Grounds Critical Realism?

The intentional cognitive operations of experiencing, understanding, and judging.

What Difference Does Critical Realism Make?

It brings about a shift in direction toward self-transcendence as the ultimate grounds of truth. All other epistemologies contain some form of naive realism that considers reality out there to be seen.

What are the Implications for Metaphysics, Ethics, and the Possibility of Transcendent Knowledge?

All are grounded in a self-transcendence that enables the transcendental injunctions to operate due to intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.

SEQUENCE

1. **Self-transcendence becomes essential to human living**, bringing with it a major change in direction toward the realm of interiority, the transcendental injunctions, and the possibility of transcendent knowledge of the Divine Mystery. When this happens, the individual is tasked with understanding a new self as well as a radically changed world due to the intentional shift in direction. While the prior envisioned world mediated by meaning still exists within the individual, it is superseded by a higher viewpoint that puts that lower level into perspective. Above all, it is a shift in what is considered to be of terminal value, of ultimate importance.
2. **Willingness exists in the gap between one's transcended and transcending selves.** The person we are, that we define ourselves by, is our transcended self. In traditional societies, who we are is defined by our culture. But in Western civilization the question of who we are as an individual—an existential question—opens up the possibility that we may become someone else in the near or far future. The radical shift to self-transcendence opens a wide gap between these two selves that brings with it a willingness to change. It is also accompanied by the realization that who one is may well be a temporary state of being, for the possibility of a radical change in terminal value, etc. associated with conversion implies that tomorrow or the day after we might understand who we are in quite different terms.
3. **Truth is no longer relative.** While human knowledge is always proportionate to being human and meaning resides within the individual (although intentionally, it is meant to be objective “out there”), this does not mean that one's person's truth is to be considered as valid as any other person's truth. With the shift to the realm of interiority comes standards or criteria for assessing what is or is not true (the epistemology of critical realism). Combined with

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CRITICAL REALISM: A RADICAL SHIFT IN WHO THE PERSON IS? A RADICAL CHANGE IN DIRECTION?

the transcendental injunctions, a knowledge of the fundamental cognitive operations at work, and the importance of ongoing conversion, “objective” standards do exist.

4. **This shift to self-transcendence leads to a need to objectify not only one's own foundational stance but that of those we encounter.** In this case, objectification meaning a heightened awareness of living in the transcendental method in which ongoing conversion plays itself out. The thing is, as long as we remain unaware of our foundational stance, as long as we place such awareness outside our horizon, we are left to engage others as if the objective world was real out there. And since we cannot easily shift our sense of self when that self is identified with what we believe is real, than conflict is inevitable. But when objectified, a knowledge of one's own and others foundational stances can lead to a real encounter that promotes understanding on both sides. Provided both sides are willing to engage in such an encounter.
5. **Foundational stances are constructed in tension between two generative principles in a dialect between good and evil.** Once religious conversion shifts away from human proportionate knowing and toward the universal perspective of the Divine, then there can be only two basic generative principles at play within the self-transcending self: the life-affirming intentions of the Divine Mystery and the death-affirming principle by all those who would oppose not only the existence of the Divine Mystery but the role of that mystery as the ultimate source of meaning. Such a dialectic pits man against God, symbolized in the Bible as a conflict between God and Satan, a battle over who is to have authority over human beings.
6. **Cultural wars over who gets to control meaning are fought within this fundamental dialectic.** Peterson talks about ideological and Utopian mentalities that lead to hell. Such restricted modes of thinking lead to ideas of political correctness that cuts off certain avenues of understanding, group-think augmented by double-speak that not only constrains thought to what group pressure enforces but changes the very meaning of words to indicate their opposite (war means peace, justice means the injustice of equality of

outcome, freedom of speech means banning hate speech, etc.).

7. **GIGO.** Garbage in, garbage out. The combination of this ongoing dialectic and the lack of any means of controlling meaning other than force and/or “scientific” reasoning has played long-term havoc within the public sphere. Add to this the various distortions brought about as different power-seekers and power-holders rationalize and justify their intentions to dominate others and you have a severely contaminated communal horizon, concepts, and operations to meet the existential demands of the times. In effect, we are living in a communal world mediated by meaning that is more fantasy than reality, more myth and fiction than grounded in intelligent reasoning and intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. And like anyone living in a make-believe world, the results are not pleasant. Plans and policies have unexpected consequences, well-intentioned actions lead to disaster, institutions collapse as they fail to cope with new problems—and so the long cycle of decline advances still further.
8. **This might not be a problem if it were not for the fact that human beings have too great a power now to allow that power to be exercised by biased minds.** We have to learn how to correct such distortions without crippling the human desire to know, to be. Even more, we need to restore the communal world mediated by meaning to some sense of sanity. Hence this cosmopolis project.

THE CONCEPT OF MEDIATION is extremely important in Lonergan's thought, for we live in a concrete sensate world that is mediated by meaning. The sensate world exists outside ourselves; meaning is internal. But there is more to the concept than just this. For example, there's **two types of mediation—energy and control—at play in the empirical sciences.** The energy mediator is the dynamic searching quality of the human mind that left unrestricted to develop all sorts of theories. This is given full expression in mathematics. But the sciences have a control mediator to contend with, and that control mediator is the necessity of restricting any theoretical development to what can be affirmed through empirical research into the sensate world.

There's another form of mediation that is extremely important when it comes to the construction of a communal world mediated by meaning, and that is the process of **mutual self-mediation** that takes place when two or more people encounter the lived reality of the others. The New Testament expresses this when Christ says that when two or more are gathered in his name, He will be there with them. In other words, something emerges when two or more are gathered together, and in this case, because of the intentionality of gathering in His name, what emerges falls in line with the reality of Christ.

NEXT WEEK: a discussion of the notion of mediation, drawing up Lonergan's 1984 essay “The Mediation of Christ in Prayer” (*Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, Volume 2, Number 1, March 1984), pp. 1-20.

FOUNDATIONS

Intentions

The tension of inquiry, the internal conditions of the subject, the question at hand, all are the result of what we intend. We are dynamic creatures, not static, and as such seek to make changes in ourselves and in the world we live.

Horizons

Intentions eventually create horizons that break down into three primary parts: what we know, what we don't know but have questions about, and what we don't know we don't know.

Objects/Things

Horizons contain sets of categories and concepts that have emerged as inquiring minds seeks insights into experience. Of these there are two main types: those concepts that relate to human existence, and those that relate to a transcendent reality.

Operations

Associated with objects/things are operations that enable individuals and communities to make changes.

Higher Perspective

All of the above undergoes a radical change in direction when intellectual, moral, and religious conversion takes place. Intentional changes as the need for self-transcendence takes precedence; horizons expand to include the possibility of a Divine Mystery's universal viewpoint; objects/things change to include not only the realm of interiority but concepts specific to human proportional understanding of the Divine; and operations expand to include religious phenomena.

To attempt to ensure objectivity apart from self-transcendence only generates illusions.

Method, p. 338